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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01OF 02 CHISINAU 000976

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STATE FOR EUR/UB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBS](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#) [MD](#)

SUBJECT: A LONG-TIME OBSERVER'S IEWS ON TRANSNISTRIAN DEVELOPMENTS

Classified B: Charge d'Affaires Kelly Keiderling for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a September 27 meeting former OSCE Ambassador to Moldova William Hill told Ambassador Chaudhry that he thought it unlikely that the planned 5-plus-2 meeting in October would gather all participants. Hill blamed Transnistrian President Igor Smirnov for avoiding a meeting with Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin prior to the 5-plus-2 meeting. He said Russian Special Envoy Valery Nesterushkin had claimed that the Russians had no new Kozak-2 plan. Meanwhile, Voronin may have given up on achieving a settlement with Transnistria before he leaves office next year. End Summary.

5-plus-2 Meeting Unlikely

¶2. (C) Ambassador met with former OSCE Ambassador to Moldova, William Hill, on September 27 to hear Hill's readout on his meetings over the previous two days with Russian Special Envoy Valery Nesterushkin and Transnistrian "President" Smirnov. Hill noted that Nesterushkin had signed onto a 5-plus-2 meeting in Vienna in October, but now seemed to doubt that it would take place. In his discussions with OSCE Mission to Moldova Ambassador Philip Remler, Hill had concluded that the Transnistrians wanted Smirnov and Voronin to participate in a 2-plus-1 meeting with Russian President Medvedev first. During his meeting with Smirnov, Remler had asked that Smirnov agree to send Transnistrian Acting "Foreign Minister" Vladimir Yastrebchak to the 5-plus-2 meeting in Vienna.

Smirnov Continues to Stall

¶3. (C) Ambassador Hill stated that, although prior to his arrival in Moldova Smirnov had not agreed to see him, Smirnov suddenly agreed to meet on Saturday, September 27. Local Transnistrian TV had reported on Ambassador Hill's presence in Moldova on Friday night, September ¶26. Smirnov wanted to do a joint TV appearance with Ambassador Hill on Saturday but Hill politely declined. Hill reported that Smirnov was likely interested in appearing to promote negotiations in public while avoiding any serious discussion on substantive issues in private. Ambassador Hill said that in his meetings with Smirnov over the years, the Transnistrian leader had generally preferred to level attacks on U.S. policy in order to avoid discussing Transnistria and Moldova.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Hill suggested that the Russians had forced Smirnov to agree to meet with Voronin prior to a 5-plus-2 meeting. Smirnov could not defy Russia, but was using any means available to avoid a meeting. Ambassador Hill noted that Russian Ambassador to Moldova Valeri Kouzmin had said that Smirnov was very talented at resisting change. Smirnov was actively working both to avoid a possible meeting with Voronin and to dodge a trip to Vienna for a 5-plus-2 meeting by taking part in Abkhazia "independence" celebrations.

What do the Russians Want?

¶5. (C) Ambassador Hill stated that Nesterushkin had come to Moldova to push the negotiation process. In their meeting, Ambassador Hill

sought to determine whether the Russians had a new proposal to unveil in a 2-plus-1 meeting. Hill asked what kind of proposal the Russians had and Nesterushkin responded that Russia had nothing. Ambassador Hill nonetheless believed that the Russians probably had some type of plan, perhaps a Kozak-2. Hill speculated that if the Russians were able to get some kind of Voronin-Smirnov declaration out of a meeting with Medvedev, it would be good public relations. This would allow the Russians to promote their image as a peacemaker and counter the international focus on their aggressive actions in Georgia.

¶6. (C) Ambassador Hill suggested that although Ambassadors Kouzmin and Nesterushkin might not necessarily be singing from the same sheet of music, they were quite close in position. Ambassador Kouzmin had advised Hill that he felt Chisinau did not have the political will to solve the conflict. Similarly, Nesterushkin had complained to Hill that Moldova was not willing to make any compromises. In particular, the Moldovans did not want to share power. Ambassador Hill speculated that the Russians might be trying to get Moldova to agree to permit a unilateral troop presence. However, he suggested that GOM capitulation to stationing Russian troops in Transnistria could cause protest demonstrations in Chisinau.

Voronin has Shifted his Timetable

¶7. (C) Ambassador Hill thought that perhaps Voronin was taking a tactical approach by not rushing into a 2-plus-1 meeting, thereby trying to see if he could get the Russians to offer more. At the same time, Ambassador Hill noted that over the years Voronin had not been patient. If something did not work, Voronin would move on to something else. Although many had originally thought and still thought that Voronin had been pushing hard for a settlement believing

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it would help his party in the elections next spring, Ambassador Hill now disagreed. Hill stressed that a bad settlement could cause much more discontent. It was possible that Voronin had concluded the same, believing that the Russians would not concede anything further.

Comment

¶8. (C) Given Smirnov's primary goal of preserving his own power, it is easy to understand his motivation for stalling any movement towards a settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. However, if Russian will and pressure are strong enough, it is not likely that Smirnov would be able to stall for much longer. Although Voronin had been pushing hard for progress before the elections next year, lately we have heard a new message from the GOM. Chisinau has come to realize that a bad agreement reached in haste could be worse for Moldova than no agreement at all. Hence, the GOM appears to be shifting its timetable.

KEIDERLING